Bushfire giving and taking

12 Feb 2009 by Jancis Robinson

*Feb 14 - see heart-warming correction re Rupert's Ridge at ** below.*

Stories continue to pour in of the devastation and terrible fatalities wreaked by the Australian bushfires. As you will have heard on this video, **Domaine Chandon** and **Punt Road** were particularly badly affected, as was the **Punch** vineyard in Yarra Valley, formerly known as **Diamond Valley** and one of Australia's finest close-planted Pinot Noir vineyards, now run by Claire and James Lance, son of David Lance, who developed the Diamond Valley label.

Michael Glover of Bannockburn in Geelong, which was spared bushfires but where the intense heat that preceded the fires has literally burnt off quite a proportion of the 2009 crop, tells me he has spoken to Claire Lance, who is reasonably optimistic. Apparently the fire tore through the vineyard burning all the vegetation and destroying the trellising, but she thinks that with luck the vineyard will recover and be productive again in a couple of years. Terrible to think that, in the context of Victorian viticulture, this is good news.

There were reports that as well as **Roundstone** in the Yarra Valley, **Rupert's Ridge** vineyard in Heathcote was also destroyed, but I have just received the good news at ** below about the latter on Sat 14 Feb. I was in Heathcote on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning (see today's video) and saw few signs of fire, thank goodness, although throughout this part of Victoria there was always the threat of fire just over the horizon. In fact on Sunday night at Shelmerdine, just as I was finishing a tasting of local wines, someone looked out of the window and wondered worriedly where the wafts of smoke were coming from - the only moment I felt at all frightened during my trip. Turned out the answer was the kitchen.

Australian premier Kevin Rudd has just announced a day of mourning for the hundreds of lives claimed by these exceptional bushfires, which must send a shiver down the spine of any Californian who has known this terrible phenomenon recently. In Australia there were reports that American specialists in bushfire containment and restitution were being shipped in to help. Those who worked on identifying the bodies after the Bali bombing are also being drafted in for the painstaking business of formally identifying those whose lives have been claimed, often in deeply rural settings.

To donate to the Australian Red Cross Victorian Bushfire Appeal 2009, see here, and/or see some of the wine-related events and schemes highlighted on Campbell Mattinson's www.winefront.com.au

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Rupert's Ridge vineyard in Heathcote region NOT destroyed as per earlier reports.

Dear Jancis and team,

Rupert's Ridge vineyard at Redesdale has been widely reported as destroyed, and was initially thought to have been so. However, thanks to heroic efforts of local winemakers and dozens of Redesdale locals and family friends, the vineyard is expected to recover from the fires. The melted bird nets have been removed, the damaged fruit snipped off and the few really fire-damaged vines have undergone a bit of surgery. Melted irrigation is being replaced and most of the blocks of vines now have water. The owners lost their house to the fire but the shed which is to be the cellar door is still standing, and the 2010 crop will make a special 'thank you vintage' to the many volunteers who pitched in to help the damaged vines survive.

So many people have worked so hard to keep this vineyard alive, and so we would appreciate it enormously if the report dated Feb 12 could be updated.

Heartfelt thanks for your recent participation in the Mornington Peninsula Pinot Celebration (my family's wine region) and subsequent reporting on the fires.

I'm a family friend of the owners of Rupert's Ridge - if you'd like to know more, my email address is above.

Best regards,

Cathy Gowdie